

Genesis 14:13-16

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When Abram learned of Lot's capture, he set out in pursuit with his allies. They pursued them a considerable distance, then defeated the kings and rescued Lot and the other captives as well as his possessions.

*Abram the Hebrew was living by the oaks of Mamre which were located in Hebron (Genesis 13:18). A fugitive who had escaped the plundering of Sodom came and told Abram that the four Mesopotamian Kings had invaded the Jordan plain and Lot had been captured. This is the first occurrence of the word Hebrew in the Bible, which means "the one from beyond" – an apt description for Abram. It distinguishes Abram from the person Mamre the Amorite. "Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol and brother of Aner, and these were allies with Abram, they were all relatives and the heads of aristocratic families in Hebron. The Hebrew word translated as "allies" here is *ba'alei berit* and means "those bound by a treaty." Treaties were a common feature of the ancient Near East. The one between Abram and the three Amorites was one of equals rather than between superiors or inferiors.*

When Abram heard that his nephew was captured, he took no thought of risking his own life to rescue Lot. Rescuing Lot was now a duty. *He led out his trained men*, in Hebrew, this has the notion of drawing a sword from its sheath. The Hebrew word for "trained" used here is *Chaniyk*, which means trained, instructed, tried, or experienced. These were men Abram knew and trusted, men he knew were capable. This action is consistent with the behavior God has rewarded; Abram is being a faithful servant in rescuing a family member in distress.

Abram had 318 trained men. How could only 318 men go up against an enemy that had just defeated five kings? There are several possibilities. It could be that after dividing the spoils the allied force broke into pieces for the return home, although the text says the kings were still together. They had vanquished cities on the way down, perhaps they thought they had no need of care on the return. It could be Abram only had to face a small part of the army.

It could also be that the overall number of warriors was small. We are not told the population of the cities. But we are only nine generations from Noah and his three sons who began repopulating the earth. So likely the earth's

population was still sparse. That could explain why Abram could show up as an immigrant in Canaan with substantial herds and find lands to graze. 318 men could have been a formidable force.

The text tells us Abram *brought back all the goods*. The use of the word *all* would indicate the spoils of the group they caught and defeated was not carrying spoils greater than Abram's company could carry back. That would seem to indicate that the force they overtook was of similar size to their own.

Abram attacked the eastern kings *by night*. It could well be that the victors were celebrating and had their guard lowered, allowing Abram the benefit of surprise. Whatever the case, we know Abram had great faith in God. And we know God was with Abram.

Abram went in pursuit as far as Dan. Abram caught up with King Chedorlaomer at Dan and defeated him along with the kings who were with him. Dan was a city about 150 miles north of Abram's home in Hebron at the base of Mount Hermon, and roughly 30 miles north of the Sea of Galilee. Dan (modern Tell el-Qadi) was considered the northernmost point of the promised land. It was on the international trade route ([Judges 20:1](#); [1 Samuel 3:20](#)). *Dan* is located in the northernmost part of modern Israel, where a number of springs source the headwaters of the Jordan River. Archeology has uncovered a city gate dated from this era that Abraham likely walked through during this episode.

He divided his forces against them by night, the speed of pursuit and a surprise night attack were likely keys in Abram's victory. The invading armies apparently did not expect to fight after dark and were unprepared for an attack. Historians believe that armies did not march after sunset in the ancient world. Abram divided his fresh troops and surprised the perhaps battle-weary, perhaps sleeping or drunken, but apparently unsuspecting armies. He apparently did not surround them but rather attacked from two different sides. The force fled, and Abram *pursued them as far as Hobah, which is north of Damascus* and defeated them. Damascus is roughly fifty miles to the east.

Abram brought back all the goods, and also brought back his relative Lot with his possessions, and also the women, and the people. When they returned, Lot continued to live in Sodom.

Biblical Text:

¹³ Then a fugitive came and told Abram the Hebrew. Now he was living by the oaks of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol and brother of Aner, and these were allies with Abram. ¹⁴ When Abram heard that his relative had been taken captive, he led out his trained men, born in his house, three hundred and eighteen, and went in pursuit as far as Dan. ¹⁵ He divided his forces against them by night, he and his servants, and defeated them, and pursued them as far as Hobah, which is north of Damascus. ¹⁶ He brought back all the goods, and also brought back his relative Lot with his possessions, and also the women, and the people.